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## SNAPSHOT

# Spinsary Brings Peace

**Women elders are part of the informal justice system in Afghanistan**



Photo: USAID/RLS-1

A group of women elders from Behsud District, Nangarhar Province meet to discuss women's role in dispute resolution and to form their own Spinsary Group.

**USAID's Informal Rule of Law Program enables women to have an enhanced public role as village mediators.**

Traditionally, village women in Afghanistan have taken a limited role in the justice system, acting as an invisible hand behind male elders in the decision making process. However, women are now stepping into the mediation forefront as the result of elders networks established by USAID.

USAID conducted numerous network meetings for some 2,100 elders (42 percent were women) across the districts in which it operates. These networks encourage male and female elders to discuss and improve local systems for alternative dispute resolution, paving the way for women elders to transition to more public dispute mediation roles in their local communities.

As an outcome of the meetings, 10 women's dispute resolution groups - known locally as *Spinsary* groups - have been established in Nangarhar, Laghman, and Kandahar provinces. Justice advisers and respected elders train the women in a range of dispute resolution techniques, traditional justice, and tribal customs.

*Spinsary* deal mainly with family disputes as well as disputes between children that are deemed too sensitive for male elders from outside families to deal with. If left unresolved, family disputes can often lead to serious violence.

As a result, the 10 *Spinsary* groups have resolved dozens of disputes.

"The group of *Spinsary* women brought peace to my home and community. If *Spinsary* didn't attend and resolve the dispute in my village, I would be in prison or killed by now," said Aajab Gul, who sought help from a *Spinsary* group to resolve a violent dispute in which he was involved.

Saifoora, a *Spinsary* from Qarghayee District in Nangarhar Province, said that since she received training in dispute resolution, she is getting the respect needed in her community for her to resolve disputes. "Many of the disputes I am helping to resolve begin as senseless disputes between children that can escalate to become a dispute between mothers and then between fathers," she said. "Having knowledge of Islamic law and Afghan law puts me in a position to mediate disputes before they become larger than they should be."